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Ex-Intelligence Agents Are Said to Have Major Roles in Oman

The following article is based on reporting by Judith Miller and Jeff Gerth and was written by Mr. Gerth.

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WASHINGTON, March 25 — Among the foreign advisers who have played a major role in the Persian Gulf nation of Oman is a former senior Central Intelligence Agency official who heads an American corporation that manages the country's most strategic region.

The corporation, Tetra Tech International, has a contract with the Government of Oman to manage the development of the Masandam Peninsula that

Second of two articles on Oman.

sits astride the Strait of Hormuz, which separates the area from Iran and through which travels a significant amount of the West's oil.

For other Americans, even such official visitors as Congressional staff members, the sensitive Masandam region is off-limits, according to two American officials who recently visited Oman and were not allowed to tour the area.

The parent of Tetra Tech International is Tetra Tech, which is based in Pasadena, Calif., and specializes in providing products and services in the areas of water and energy resources. It is a subsidiary of Honeywell Inc., a leading United States military contractor with headquarters in Minneapolis.

Tetra Tech International helps manage several key Omani Government agencies in addition to Masandam Province, and the company and its parent work for both commercial and government customers in several other Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, as well as in the United States.

The president of Tetra Tech International and the man who helped to get its contract in Oman is James H. Critchfield, who, before joining the company in 1975, had an interest in Oman, working for the C.I.A. both as head of the Middle East desk and later as the chief intelligence official for energy, according to former intelligence officials and public documents.

Mr. Critchfield is among about 20 American, British and Arab advisers to the country's ruler, Sultan Qabus bin Said, who have helped shape the country's foreign and domestic policies. Like Mr. Critchfield, many of the advisers have intelligence backgrounds.

In an interview late last year, Mr. Critchfield acknowledged that he is one of the closest American advisers to Oman's ruler, and he said he no longer had anything to do with the C.I.A.

Yet there is a widespread perception in Oman that Mr. Critchfield and others with intelligence backgrounds retain ties to their former employers. As a result, Western and Omani officials said, the role of Westerners in Oman has become a subject of dispute.

An Active Area For Spy Agencies

The Middle East has long been a cauldron of intrigue and foreign intelligence activities by both Western and Communist countries; the Russians, the officials noted, are known to be active throughout much of the region, primarily in Syria, Libya and Southern Yemen.

In addition, Western and Arab officials said, for many in the Middle East, truth and rumor are often blurred, and perceptions tend to be as politically important as fact. One of the legacies, they said, is that Omanis tend to believe that former associations with intelligence agencies continue.

The perceptions are often enhanced by the nature of the C.I.A. itself, the officials said, in part because the agency has a variety of relationships with outsiders ranging from contract employees to part-time informants to contacts like businessmen and journalists who debrief the agency on various matters.

The issue of advisers in Oman figures in an investigation by the Securities and Exchange Commission into millions of dollars in payments made by Ashland Oil to secure business in Oman.

The investigation is into possible violations by Ashland of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which forbids payments by American companies to foreign officials. The recipients of some of the payments, Timothy Landon, a British military official, and Yehia Omar, a Libyan exile, have both been Omani advisers, according to official diplomatic registers.

Mr. Landon and Mr. Omar have had past dealings with the C.I.A., according to several Omani officials, former American intelligence officials and the Ashland public documents, which were submitted to a Congressional committee and filed with the S.E.C.

Mr. Landon, who lives in England and no longer has an official role in Oman, declined a request to be interviewed. A spokesman for Mr. Omar, who also no longer has an official role in Oman, said Mr. Omar would not talk with the press.

Roles for Foreigners After 1970 Coup

The relationships between foreign advisers and Oman blossomed soon after the coup in 1970 that brought Sultan Qabus to power, according to Omani and Western officials, some of the advisers and public documents.

Since then, the advisers have been involved in writing Omani laws, establishing diplomatic relationships between Oman and its neighbors, providing security for the nation's ruler and lobbying for Oman in the United States.

In 1971, Robert B. Anderson, a former Secretary of the Treasury in the Eisenhower Administration, became an unpaid economic adviser to the Sultan. His job, he said in an interview late last year, was "to consult on ways to improve their economy" and get Oman "out from under the dominance of the British," who arrived in the country before the American advisers.

Mr. Anderson said his Omani role was arranged in part by Ghassan Shakir, a Saudi with close ties to the United States and Mr. Anderson. Mr.

Shakir also became an adviser to the Sultan, as did Mr. Omar, the Libyan exile, according to American intelligence officials and a 1981 report prepared by Ashland Oil lawyers for the company's board of directors. The report investigated allegations by Ashland officials involved in Omani business ventures that payments to Mr. Omar and Mr. Landon had violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act; it concluded that the payments did not violate the law.

Mr. Omar and Mr. Shakir later came under criticism from British bankers and Omani officials for millions of dollars in commissions they made during Oman's development in the 1970's, according to Omani officials and the 1981 Ashland report filed with the S.E.C. No formal charges were ever brought against the two men.

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